

## Preface ix

The ~~document~~ *The Hoe* is the result of studies made over a period of years. Several short sections of this book have appeared in substance in *Haiti Singing* (1939), the *Musical Quarterly*, the *Journal of Negro History*, and other journals. The song and story texts presented in several chapters were taken on disc and tape recorders during nine separate field trips to Haiti, between 1937 and 1955. They have been selected from more than six hundred examples recorded by this method. 114  
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Support for work on these recorded materials was received from the American Council of Learned Societies and the American Philosophical Society. Research on African survivals in the New World was aided by a Guggenheim fellowship. Originals or copies of some of the tape and disc recordings are now in the archives of Indiana University and Northwestern University. 122  
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I am of course indebted to the work of a number of scholars, cited 127

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celebrated with elaborate rituals for the dead. As in Haiti, great importance is laid on the presence of all living descendants, whose numbers are calculated to influence the ancestors' behavior. And as in Haiti, the first yams and the first rice are offered to the dead, and only after the family ritual does the family divide the crop.<sup>A</sup>

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#### SERVICE FOR THE ASSOTOR DRUM

The *assotor* drum is the largest and most sacred of all Haitian drums. Around it is built an impressive and elaborate service known as the *mangé assotor*, which, according to local traditions and circumstances, may be held as often as every three years or as infrequently as every twenty-one years. The period between *mangés* always consists of an odd number of years. A houngan from Jérémie declared the service might properly be held every three, five, or seven years. Another cult priest in the Cul-de-Sac Plain said it could be held every seven, seventeen, or twenty-one years. The *assotor* is known as the *plus grand moune* (the most venerable "man") of the hounfor. However, few cult centers possess an *assotor*. "Assotor c'est fort bagaille, c'est pas zaffai tout moune" (The *assotor* is powerful, it isn't everybody's affair), Haitians say. This is what a man from Jérémie tells about it:

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"The *assotor* is the greatest of all things in the hounfor. The Rada drums are only for the Dahomey nation. The Congo drums are for the Congo nation. The *assotor* is a man of Dahomey, but he is for all nations. It is for all loa—Pétro, Congo, Bumba, Dahomey. The *assotor* belongs to Dahomey, but when there is a great service the *assotor* is the host to the loa of every rite, the loa of Haiti and of Africa. When the *assotor* is played, the loa are awakened everywhere. Loa who have been forgotten by the Creoles (Haitians) will come to the service and mount people, and when the loa have gone, many people don't know what loa has been riding them. Some ancient spirits from far away come only to the *assotor* service, and when it is over they aren't heard of again.

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"The *assotor* drum is not for small things, it is for great occasions. For some people there are no occasions in their whole lives great enough for an *assotor* service. When all other things have failed, it is only then that the *assotor* is called upon.

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"If a big houngan should have an *assotor* drum, he can have only one, and it is the chief of the hounfor. All other drums are its servants. You can make an *assotor*, but it is not necessarily an *assotor*. It may look like an *assotor* and not be an *assotor*. To be an *assotor* it must not only have the shape of an *assotor* but it must be accepted by the loa. There was a houngan near Jérémie who made an *assotor* and held a great service with it,

<sup>A</sup> [Informant: Albert Kofi Prempeh, Ghana.  
cf. p. 351, category 116. -- Analysis]

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house, which is on fire. But there is no grief, because Ogoun is the master of fire:

Pierre, Pierre Narcisse oh!  
Yago moulé-é!  
Caille Ogoun loulé!  
Gihlive Ogoun bel lal  
Na consolé! [Ex. 88]

Pierre, Pierre Narcisse, oh!  
Yago moulé-é!  
Ogoun's house is burning!  
Ogoun's distillery is beautiful  
We console ourselves!

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Some of the ritual songs that have persisted through the years have lost their explicit meaning but continue to survive because of beautiful melodies and perhaps the strange images they evoke. Such a song is this one to the loa Atti Daï, from the Dahomey service:

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Atti Daï oh!  
Yn'voyé dit nwin  
Min soleil malade!  
Quan'm té rivé  
Moin joiné soleil mourir  
Quan'm té rivé  
Moin joiné soleil mourir  
C'est regrettant ça  
Pou'm enteré soleil [Ex. 89]

Atti Daï, oh!  
They sent to tell me  
The sun was sick!  
When I arrived  
I found the sun had died!  
When I arrived  
I found the sun had died!  
What grief it was  
For me to bury the sun!

One of the truly lovely songs of the Dahomey rites, both in melody and in lyrics, is the following one to the deity Ezilie. It shows clear evidence of Catholic ritual influence in both its text and its music. Ezilie Fréda, who seems to be speaking most of the lines, is identified with the Virgin Mary, and the tone of this piece casts her more in her Catholic role than her African. The deity is speaking from Yagaza, a place described as being "on the other side of the water." In form the song is atypical in that it has more than one movement and progresses from one idea to another.

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Ezilie Nainain oh!  
Ezilie Nainain oh!  
Ezilie oh, c'est moin Yagaza!

Ezilie n'ap marché n'ap couté n'ap parlé pou' temps y'ap parlé parole moin!  
Ezilie n'ap marché n'ap couté pou' temps y'ap parlé parole moin!  
Ezilie Nainain oh!  
Ezilie Fréda oh Nainain oh!  
Ezilie Fréda oh, c'est moin Yagaza!

Mendames nà yo chita nan caille là yo vité djailé oh tout temps soleil pas l'éfè!  
Mendames yo passé ya tombé à à ginoux y'apé plainnint le sœt yo!

\* Some Haitian informants claimed that *soleil* meant "sun." Others felt that this word in the song was really *Sold*, a diminutive of *Antoinette*, another name for Atti Daï.

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[197] the Haitian word for "twins." They are used primarily for secular music of the Cuban type, and may in fact be an importation from Cuba. The marassa is one of the few drums on which a finger technique is used; that is, striking with individual fingers rather than with grouped fingers. Marassas are often played in concert with guitars and marimbas.

The *basse* is the shallow finger drum resembling what in the United States is called the tambourine. Constructed in the pattern of an African prototype, its head is usually fifteen or eighteen inches in diameter and made of goatskin. Small metal disks sometimes are inserted in the frame to act as rattles. The head is kept well coated with resin or beeswax and is tapped and rubbed with the fingers. The *basse* is used only for secular music, except in the rare instances when it is used in Congo services. Some Haitians believe that the name of the instrument comes from the word *Basque*.

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202 It is reported that signal drums were still in use a decade ago in remote sections of the southwestern peninsula. One of these instruments, according to description, is distinguished mainly by its large belly and small mouth; like the Juba drum, it is played on its side. Another style of signal drum has a slit in the side and is played erect, much like an African slit-log drum standing on end.

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[191] Another percussion instrument is the bamboo stamping tube, called the *ganbo* or *ti kanmbo*. It is African in origin and probably takes its name from the Loango term for the same device, *dikanmbo*.<sup>2</sup> The stamping tube is simply a length of bamboo, open at one end and closed at the other by a natural joint membrane. The closed end is struck sharply upon the ground, and the tone comes from the open top. The device works like an inverted drum, the closed end functioning like a drumhead. A battery of four or five ganbos may provide the percussion music otherwise played by drums. The musician corresponding to the *bulatier* of the drum orchestra plays two small stamping tubes, one in each hand. The other musicians have one each, thicker and longer than the *bulatier*'s and producing deeper tones. Cupped hands are manipulated over the open ends for varying the sounds. This instrument has survived in various parts of the New World where Africans were settled, particularly other West Indian islands, Brazil, and Venezuela. In Venezuela the stamping tubes are called *quitiplas*.<sup>3</sup> They have recently been reported from various areas of West Africa, including French Equatorial Africa.<sup>4</sup>

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798 The ganbos had a singular burst of popularity in Haiti during the United States military occupation of the country after the first World War, when drums were often seized and destroyed. Drums could not

• [115] <sup>2</sup> [Informant: Joseph Lengo, Brazzaville. Cf. P 354, Category 116. -- Analysis]  
<sup>3</sup> [Library of Congress album, Folk Music of Venezuela. Cf. P 354 Category 116. -- Analysis]  
<sup>4</sup> [ pamphlet accompanying recording, Music of Equatorial Africa (New York: Ethnographic Folkways Library, 1950). Cf. P 354, Cat. 116. -- Analysis ]

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Except for the "aperture for the escape of the sound," the Bongo instrument is identical with the Haitian earth bow. The resemblance of the instrument to a spring snare strongly suggests that it may have been developed from some such device for catching game. This possibility is strengthened by the use of the earth bow among certain of the Bambarra hunters of the French Sudan as a game lure, the music played upon it being thought to have magical properties to attract animals to the region of the hunt.<sup>9</sup> A "portable" type of spring snare used among the Ashanti of Ghana is strikingly similar in form to the Haitian "portable" earth bow (see fig. 80).<sup>10</sup>

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This instrument has survived not only in Haiti but in the United States as well. The washtub device that is an important part of American Negro folk music is a clear development of the earth bow. The washtub is inverted and a cord is attached to the tin bottom. The other end of the cord is fastened to a stick which is braced against the lip of the bottom side of the tub. The stick and the cord are manipulated precisely like the Haitian and African instruments. There is implicit evidence that the role of the washtub has been taken over in modern jazz orchestras by the double-bass fiddle.

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Another device of African provenience is the Haitian *marimba* (also called *malimba*, *manimba*, and *marimbula*). It consists of a wooden box upon which a series of metal strips is mounted in such a way that they may be plucked with the fingers. In the face of the box, directly behind the keys, there is an aperture to permit the escape of the sound. The number of keys varies from three to seven or more, though some of them may produce duplicate tones. The instrument is usually about the size of a soap box. The musician sits upon it, facing the same way as the keyboard, and plays with his hands between his knees. The marimba is used for carnival music and for dances of the secular types, frequently in combination with a guitar, claves, and a cha-cha. It is a West Indian development of the small African *m'bila* or *sansa*, or "thumb piano." Several examples of the smaller instruments played with the thumbs have been found elsewhere in the West Indies, notably in Cuba,<sup>11</sup> and large forms of the *sansa* have been reported in recent years in Africa.

Among the instruments more or less restricted to religious service are whistles and small hand bells, which are used for invoking and saluting the loa and the dead. *Canniers* (large clay water vessels) also enter into ritual use. They are sung into, tapped with sticks, and on some occasions are covered with goatskin heads and played like a drum.

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<sup>9</sup> [Fig. 80 appears on p. 112-SS. -- Analyst]

<sup>10</sup> [Informant: Sobihas TORE, Bamewo. Cf. p. 354, [115] •]

<sup>11</sup> [Category 116. -- Analyst]

<sup>12</sup> [See Courlander, *OP. CIT.*, p. 239. Cf. p. 354 Cat. 116. -- Analyst]